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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Central Africa and the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the statement of the President of the Security Council dated 11 June 2015 (S/PRST/2015/12), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed about the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). It provides an assessment of the major political and security trends in the Central African subregion since the previous report, dated 28 November 2016 (S/2016/996), and provides an update on progress in the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA and on efforts to implement the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (see S/2012/481).

II. Major developments in the Central African subregion

A. Political, peace and security developments and trends

2. Tensions from disputed electoral processes continued to affect the subregion, mitigated in some cases by attempts to promote dialogue between governments and opposition groups. Economic and social challenges aggravated prevailing political grievances in several places. Despite regional efforts to counter Boko Haram, continuing violence has deepened a serious humanitarian crisis and development deficit in the Lake Chad basin region. During a visit from 2 to 7 March, the Security Council took stock of the situation and raised awareness of the crisis. The visit led to the adoption of resolution 2349 (2017) on 31 March 2017. Separately, national, regional and international efforts to combat LRA continued, along with efforts to reconfigure the African Union Regional Task Force, following the withdrawal of the forces of South Sudan, Uganda and the United States of America.

3. An economic downturn contributed to political and social tensions, provoking strikes in some countries over austerity measures and delayed salary payments. On 23 December 2016, an extraordinary summit of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), held in Yaoundé, focused on the economic and financial situation of member States adversely affected by the fall in the global prices of raw materials, especially oil. The summit adopted a series of economic

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resilience measures and decided to accelerate efforts to promote the free movement of people and goods. On 17 February 2017, the thirteenth ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community, held in Djibloho, Equatorial Guinea, assessed the status of implementation of the reform programme on economic and financial affairs, launched at the Yaoundé summit, and discussed the free movement of persons.

4. The implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, which seeks to ensure the effective participation of women in decision-making, remains a challenge in the subregion. Some positive developments have been observed, including the mobilization of women's networks and the creation of a women's regional platform on women, peace and security, but more work is clearly needed.

5. On 10 February, I appointed François Louncény Fall as my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA (see S/2017/137).

Political developments and trends

6. Following the announcement on 3 February by the President of Angola, José Eduardo dos Santos, that he would not seek re-election, the ruling party, Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, confirmed that the Minister of Defence, João Lourenço, and the Minister of Territorial Administration, Bornito de Sousa, would lead the party's ticket during the August 2017 elections for the posts of President and Vice-President, respectively. The opposition party União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola declared on 21 February that it would not join in an electoral coalition with other opposition parties. Meanwhile, the voter registration process was completed, with approximately 9 million voters registered, 2 million of whom are newly registered.

7. In Cameroon, social unrest continued in the North-West and South-West regions over the imposition of the French language in judicial, educational and other fields. While the initial protests in late 2016 were related to grievances expressed by unions representing lawyers and teachers, accusations expanded to include historical, political and economic discrimination against the anglophone population. Numerous clashes with security forces took place, along with ongoing general strikes (also referred to as "ghost towns"), arrests of anglophone activists and an Internet blackout in the two regions (from 17 January to 20 April 2017).

8. Government efforts to appease those tensions at the outset were not successful. On 17 January, it banned the activities of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium and the secessionist movement, the Southern Cameroons National Council, accusing them of conducting actions contrary to the Constitution and aimed at undermining State security. Leaders of the Consortium, Nkongho Felix Agbor-Balla and Fontem Aforteka'a Neba, were also arrested on 17 January, and journalist and activist Mancho Bibixy on 20 January. All three face charges of terrorism and, if convicted, could face the death penalty under the country's anti-terrorism law of February 2014. The trial of the three lead activists and five others, all civilians, commenced on 13 February at the Yaoundé military tribunal. On 7 April, the court adjoined the case of 25 other defendants. Meanwhile, another military tribunal was held, in the case of a reporter for Radio France Internationale, Ahmed Abba, whom the Government alleges to have colluded with Boko Haram. He had been in detention since 30 July 2015. The defendant, who pleaded not guilty, was sentenced to 10 years in prison on 20 April 2017.

9. On 15 March, the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, appointed the president and 13 representatives of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism, which he established on 23 January. The

Presidency also contacted the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium on 17 March, expressing willingness to engage in dialogue to address their grievances. Moreover, on 30 March, the Minister of Justice unveiled a number of measures taken by the Government to address the crisis, including the creation of a common law section at the École nationale de magistrature, English law departments at a number of universities, the redeployment of magistrates according to linguistic criteria, and the appointment of additional anglophone magistrates at the High Court. Those steps were deemed insufficient by the striking lawyers and the leadership of the Consortium, who continued to demand the immediate release and pardon of those detained and the restoration of Internet service in the two regions where it had been blocked. Internet service was restored on 20 April.

10. In Chad, a new law was passed in December 2016, which prohibits strikes from lasting more than three days. On 6 January, the Minister for Territorial Administration and Local Governance banned the Mouvement d'éveil citoyen platform, comprising political parties and civil society organizations calling for strikes. The Minister cited the illegal and subversive nature of the group, which was purportedly supported by opposition armed groups. On the same day, trade unions announced the resumption of a nationwide strike, due to the lack of progress in negotiations with the Government over salary arrears and austerity measures. However, on 6 March, the trade unions suspended the strike as a gesture of goodwill to allow negotiations to be held in a peaceful environment under the framework of an ad hoc committee established that month.

11. In the context of the economic crisis facing Chad, on 2 February, the President, Idriss Déby Itno, announced the indefinite postponement of legislative elections, initially due to be held in 2015, citing a lack of funds. In response, the opposition coalition, Front de l'opposition nouvelle pour l'alternance et le changement, called for the holding of legislative elections without further delay, declaring that it would not recognize the legitimacy of the National Assembly after 21 June 2017. Moreover, on 5 February, the President reshuffled the Government, led by the Prime Minister, Albert Pahimi Padacké, and reduced the number of ministerial posts from 33 to 21. The reshuffle followed the election at the end of January of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Moussa Faki Mahamat, as Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

12. Meanwhile, as part of efforts to address lingering political tensions related to the presidential election held in April 2016, on 9 February, the President of Chad formally installed the 16 members of the Haut comité chargé des réformes institutionnelles, which, among other responsibilities, will draft a new constitution and design and implement other institutional reforms. The body includes Government ministers, members of the presidential cabinet, parliamentarians and members of civil society.

13. In the Central African Republic, the President, Faustin Archange Touadéra, continued efforts to foster dialogue with the armed groups. Following robust action by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and for the first time since the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation was held in May 2015, all 14 main armed groups participated in a meeting of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, which was held in April 2017. The presence of armed groups was also successfully reduced in Bambari as a result of the Mission's robust posture, enabling the start of the restoration of State authority. While Bangui remained relatively calm, violence escalated between the armed groups in the centre and east of the country, causing high numbers of civilian casualties, adding to the number of displaced people and hampering aid and recovery efforts. In the worst attack against MINUSCA to date, on 8 May,

anti-balaka elements killed five peacekeepers and injured 10 peacekeepers, in the south-east of the country. Following the decision of the United States and subsequently of Uganda and South Sudan to cease operations and withdraw from the African Union Regional Task Force, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union requested that the Security Council include the disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army in the mandate of MINUSCA.

14. In the Republic of the Congo, tensions related to the presidential election held in March 2016 and the subsequent crisis in the Pool region continued to fester, with main opposition leaders in detention pending trial, while others had had their freedom of movement restricted. In addition, some segments of the opposition continue to contest the legitimacy of the election and of the current Government. On 10 January, opposition leader and former presidential candidate, André Okombi Salissa, was arrested in Brazzaville on charges of illegal possession of weapons and an attempt to undermine State security. His parliamentary immunity was subsequently lifted, on 19 January, by the National Assembly, paving the way for possible prosecution. On 3 May, the head of the opposition party Cercle des démocrates et républicains du Congo, Modeste Boukadia, was sentenced to 30 years' imprisonment for undermining State security. On 5 May, ahead of the legislative and municipal elections that are scheduled to be held on 16 July 2017, the Government announced that the revision of the electoral list would occur between 10 May and 20 June. It also appointed members of the administrative commissions in charge of the revision.

15. From 5 to 7 March, some 300 delegates from political parties and civil society held consultations in Ouesso, in the north of the Republic of the Congo, organized by the Government, to prepare for the legislative and municipal elections in July 2017. At the meeting, opposition parties stressed the need to revise the electoral list, while the opposition party Mouvement des jeunes démocrates criticized the fact that the agenda excluded discussions on the release of political prisoners and the crisis in the Pool region. Key opposition members, including the leaders of the platforms Front républicain pour le respect de l'ordre constitutionnel et l'alternance démocratique and Initiative pour la démocratie au Congo, who contest the re-election of the President, Denis Sassou Nguesso, were notably absent from the meeting. They demand a national dialogue to find a political solution to the crisis in the Pool region, among other things.

16. On 25 January, the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, officially informed his Council of Ministers of his decision to grant political asylum to the former President of the Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, drawing criticism from the main opposition party, Convergencia para la Democracia Social. Meanwhile, on 23 January, Equatorial Guinea officially requested membership in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

17. The political scene in Gabon has been dominated by preparations for the Government-led national dialogue, following the presidential election held in August 2016; the continued rejection by opposition leader, Jean Ping, and his supporters of President Ali Bongo Ondimba's re-election and their refusal to participate in the national dialogue, along with shifts in political alliances; and strikes in the oil and education sectors, as well as by customs officers.

18. Pursuant to the decree by the President of Gabon regarding the convening of a Government-led national dialogue to address political grievances, the process commenced with civil society consultations, held from 29 March to 12 April. These were followed by political consultations, held from 18 April to 3 May. Thematic issues discussed included institutional and electoral reforms and the dialogue explored ways to achieve national reconciliation and social cohesion.

19. A number of current and former high-level officials were arrested in the context of an anti-corruption drive in Gabon. On 10 January, a special adviser to the President and former holder of several ministerial portfolios was arrested for allegedly embezzling nearly $1 billion of public funds. On 12 January, the former Minister of Mines, Petroleum and Hydrocarbons was arrested over similar allegations, after having been relieved of his functions a day earlier. On 2 March, the Public Prosecutor announced that the Director General of Customs had been arrested and jailed on charges of embezzlement. International arrest warrants were issued against a number of individuals, including the son of opposition leader Jean Ping.

20. In Rwanda, the Government announced on 10 December that the presidential election would be held in August 2017. In addition to the incumbent President, Paul Kagame, other candidates include a journalist, Philippe Mpayimana, and the head of the Government-recognized opposition Democratic Green Party, Frank Habineza.

21. In preparation for legislative and municipal elections in Sao Tome and Principe, to be held in 2018, the National Electoral Commission is presently conducting a census to update the voter rolls for issuance of new biometric identification cards.

Security developments and trends

Boko Haram

22. The concerted military operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force and the national armed forces of the Lake Chad basin countries continued to degrade Boko Haram's ability to attack. While the group has shifted most of its attacks to military positions, it remains capable of attacking the civilian population through suicide bombings. During the reporting period, Boko Haram was responsible for at least 76 attacks in Cameroon's Far North region, of which 15 were suicide bombings, causing the death of 48 people, and four attacks in Chad's Lac region, resulting in the death of 24 people.

23. On 22 January, a helicopter of the Cameroonian armed forces crashed in the Bogo area of Cameroon, killing General Jacob Kodji, who had led the national military response against Boko Haram for the previous two years, and three other officers. On 24 April, three Cameroonian soldiers were killed when their vehicle hit a landmine in the vicinity of Mora. On 15 March, the Government of Cameroon announced the release of over 5,000 civilian hostages and the killing of 60 Boko Haram fighters during a military operation along the border with Nigeria. Following the announcement, a Boko Haram propaganda video, depicting Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau, surfaced on social media, on 1 April. The video called on his followers to attack sites in Cameroon, including its capital.

24. In Chad, on 5 May, an attack by Boko Haram against an army post in Kaiga, in the Lac region, resulted in the killing of nine soldiers. Some 40 Boko Haram elements were also killed as the army responded to the attack. While there have been fewer Boko Haram attacks in the country, tight security restrictions have disrupted the livelihoods of the local population, including seriously limiting trans-border trade. By end of 2016, hundreds of people, mostly women and children, reportedly associated with Boko Haram, surrendered to the Multinational Joint Task Force, continuing a trend that began in July 2016. A mission led by the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and my Special Representatives for Central Africa and for West Africa and the Sahel (see also para. 59 below), found the Government open to international technical assistance to handle those detainees. On 17 February, the Minister of Public Security and Immigration and the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security signed a

joint communiqué to that effect, documenting commitments to manage former members of Boko Haram, including temporary detention, de-radicalization, vetting and reintegration. The communiqué called for international assistance to address the defection phenomenon, which is expected to increase with the weakening of Boko Haram. Shortly after the signing of the communiqué, the Government released the vast majority of those who had surrendered, who returned to their communities of origin, without a proper determination of their status, including any potential association with Boko Haram, having been completed.

Lord's Resistance Army

25. The Lord's Resistance Army remains a significant threat to the population in affected areas. Since the beginning of 2017, multiple LRA groups, usually comprising 12 to 16 elements, according to defectors and local authorities, have shown increased boldness by raiding villages in the Dungu, Niangara, Ango and Bondo territories in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as poaching elephants in Garamba National Park. There has also been a surge of abductions of young boys and girls by LRA, usually around the ages of 12 or 13, to boost LRA ranks. On 11 March in Dungu, LRA elements clashed with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, resulting in the death of one army officer and the injury of another, along with the deaths of three LRA combatants.

26. LRA groups have also persistently attacked the civilian population in the Central African Republic along the Obo-Zemio axis. On 10 March, an attempt by unidentified armed elements, presumed to be LRA, to ambush a MINUSCA convoy along the Zemio-Rafai axis resulted in an exchange of fire.

27. LRA also continued to operate within a broader context that facilitates its activities, including illicit trafficking networks that exist in its areas of operation, ongoing activities of other armed groups and conflicts over land rights and access involving farmers and herders.

28. On 29 January, the Heads of State and Government of countries affected by LRA held a summit on the margins of the twenty-eighth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa, at the request of the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni. The summit recommended, among other matters, the need for cross-border operations against LRA, accurate intelligence about its movements and rebuilding the capacity of the Central African Armed Forces.

29. The sixth ministerial meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army was held in Addis Ababa, on 29 and 30 March, to review the revised strategic concept of operations and coordination mechanisms for cross-border operations. As earlier indicated, the Governments of Uganda and South Sudan commenced their disengagement from the African Union Regional Task Force, following the withdrawal by the United States, on 26 April, of its special forces and logistical support from the Regional Task Force. South Sudan also indicated that it would no longer host the sector headquarters of the Task Force in Yambio. Nonetheless, Uganda, South Sudan and the Sudan offered to train the Central African armed forces to take over the Task Force responsibilities. In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, the latter's request for membership in the Regional Cooperation Initiative having been accepted, expressed reservations regarding cross-border operations in their territories.

30. On 19 April, a first batch of 31 Ugandan military personnel, of the 2,000 who were deployed in the Central African Republic as part of the Task Force, arrived in Kampala. Since then, 800 additional personnel have left the Central African

Republic. At the time of writing, an imminent departure for Uganda was expected for the remaining military elements.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

31. Since my previous report, 11 incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea have been reported by the International Maritime Organization.

32. On 22 February, the leadership of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea was formally installed at a ceremony held in Yaoundé, following a decision taken by the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States at the African Union summit held on 30 and 31 January.

Poaching and the illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources

33. A research study released in February 2017 indicated that the elephant population in the Minkebe National Park in Gabon had declined by nearly 80 per cent — a loss of more than 25,000 elephants — between 2004 and 2014. Transnational poaching networks drove the significant decline, despite the efforts of the Government of Gabon since 2011.

B. Humanitarian developments

34. Persistent violence and insecurity caused by Boko Haram have brought devastation to families and communities in the Lake Chad basin region, where some 2.4 million people have been displaced and more than 7 million people require food assistance. Across the region, more than 10 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, making it one of the world's largest humanitarian crises. The year 2016 saw a significant scale-up in the humanitarian response across the worst-hit areas. Owing to the collective efforts of Governments, donors, United Nations entities and non-governmental organizations, in 2016 up to 1.6 million people received life-saving food assistance; 1 million children were vaccinated against measles; 4.4 million people accessed emergency primary health care; almost 300,000 boys and girls resumed their education; and the same number of children under 5 and nursing mothers were treated for malnutrition, two thirds of whom were at risk of dying. At an international humanitarian conference held in Oslo on 24 February, 14 donor countries pledged $672 million over three years in emergency aid for the population in the Lake Chad region, 70 per cent of which has been allocated for 2017.

35. Although military operations have degraded and scattered Boko Haram fighters, attacks and suicide bombings continue in Cameroon's Far North region, where an estimated 220,000 persons have been displaced. The region also hosts 86,000 Nigerian refugees. In addition, the onset of the dry season has eased movement, resulting in increased attacks along the main roads and hampering humanitarian access. On 2 March, the Tripartite Agreement between Cameroon, Nigeria and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was signed in Yaoundé. The Agreement establishes the conditions and procedures for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of Nigerian refugees. However, the Office of the High Commissioner reported that instances of refoulement of Nigerian asylum seekers in Cameroon continued despite the agreement, and that by 21 March, more than 2,600 refugees had been returned to Nigerian border villages against their will in 2017. The Government of Cameroon denied the reports. In eastern Cameroon, critical funding gaps are threatening the sustainability of vital food assistance programmes for refugees from the Central African Republic, 276,000 of whom

remain in the country. For 2017, the humanitarian community in Cameroon is seeking $310 million to provide life-saving assistance and address the acute and chronic needs of 1.2 million people.

36. In Chad, some 4 million people, around one third of the country's population, are food insecure, among whom more than 1 million face severe shortages. Over half a million children are expected to suffer acute malnutrition in 2017. In the western Lac region, food insecurity has grown and persists as a result of Boko Haram activities. The resulting population displacement has accentuated the vulnerability of those forced to flee violence and the communities hosting them, many of whom were already impoverished and needed assistance prior to the upsurge in attacks. Additionally, Chad hosts some 615,000 refugees from the Central African Republic, Nigeria and the Sudan, in addition to some 104,000 internally displaced people. In 2017, $589 million is required to provide life-saving assistance for 2.6 million people affected by crisis in Chad.

37. In the Central African Republic, violent clashes between armed groups since November 2016 have resulted in a sharp deterioration of the security situation, causing the displacement of populations in Haute-Kotto and Ouaka districts. The country remains one of the most dangerous environments for humanitarian workers, as it accounted for 31 per cent of worldwide security incidents in 2016. As of March 2017, nearly 464,000 Central Africans have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, while some 402,000 were internally displaced. Food scarcity across the country remains acute, with nearly half of the population being food insecure. Persistent insecurity and population displacements have disrupted agricultural and pastoral activities, the main source of income and food for the vast majority of Central Africans, particularly in rural areas, with 65 per cent unable to farm in 2016. The 2016 Humanitarian Response Plan remains largely underfunded, with only 36 per cent of the needed $531.5 million received, resulting in nearly half of the population being left without humanitarian assistance. In 2017, almost $400 million will be required to assist 2.2 million people.

C. Human rights trends

38. Violations of human rights continued in many countries of the subregion. The excessive use of force, arbitrary arrests and the detention of political opponents, civil society activists and media practitioners illustrate a trend of the continued narrowing of the democratic and political space in the subregion. The climate of impunity that prevails in some States remains a concern and represents a serious impediment to the creation of an environment conducive to the holding of peaceful electoral processes and smooth democratic transitions.

39. In Cameroon, a peaceful demonstration held on 28 November by students from the University of Buea was repressed by security forces, who resorted to the excessive use of force, coupled with arbitrary arrests and detention. On 8 December, protests organized by youth groups in Bamenda, the capital of the North-West region, escalated when police and security forces used tear gas and water cannons against protesters, before eventually opening fire. At least two protesters were killed and four police officers injured. A police precinct was burned down and Government vehicles were set ablaze. There have also been other violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association, peaceful assembly and access to information, including the arrests and detention of journalists, as well as the shutdown of Internet and two radio stations in Bamenda and Buea between mid-January and mid-April.

40. A national action plan to guide the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) has been finalized and awaits official presentation to the Government of Cameroon. In 2016, the country adopted a new penal code that protects the rights of women and girls, in particular regarding the custody of minors, female genital mutilation and sexual violence. The national strategy on addressing gender-based violence and the national action plan on addressing female genital mutilation were recently reviewed to conform to international human rights standards.

41. The human rights situation in the Republic of the Congo continues to raise concern, with reports from local civil society organizations and opposition parties pointing to the continuous narrowing of the democratic space and allegations of human rights violations, including cases of torture, arbitrary arrests, detention and forced disappearances. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to engage with the Government regarding the follow-up to the recommendations made subsequent to its human rights assessment mission of June and July 2016.

42. In Chad, several prominent civil society activists have been detained or have reported being harassed by security officials since April, raising human rights concerns. They included members of non-governmental organizations who were undertaking or calling for civil disobedience, which goes against a recent law passed by the Government prohibiting strikes lasting more than three days.

43. Since December 2016, in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA has documented 986 new verified incidents of violations or abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against 1,410 victims, including 934 men, 157 women, 63 boys and 43 girls. The violations included arbitrary killings, cruel and inhuman treatment, the expropriation of property and pillages, conflict-related sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests and detentions, as well as abductions. In addition to those verified incidents, investigations are ongoing into incidents that occurred recently in Alindao, Bangassou and Niem.

D. Socioeconomic trends

44. Economic activity in the subregion continued to decline. According to data from the Bank of Central African States, the real gross domestic product growth rate of countries of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community region was 0.2 per cent in 2016, compared to 1.7 per cent in 2015, as a consequence of the continued decline in global commodity prices, notably oil. The security situation in the subregion has further hampered the capacity of States to invest in the promotion of sustainable human development. The Bank has forecast a 1.6 per cent growth rate for 2017, linked to the slight rise in oil prices and the implementation of measures for economic and financial reforms in the subregion.

45. Although the subregion has made some progress on human development, particularly in the education and health sectors, much remains to be done to achieve the related objectives and targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Several factors hamper such progress, including inequalities, the lack of structural transformation and diversification, the lack of progress towards gender equality and the full empowerment of women in the political, economic and social spheres and vulnerability related to unpredictable shocks, such as food shortages and the impact of climate change.

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation

46. During the reporting period, my Special Representative for Central Africa continued to be actively engaged in the subregion in promoting regional peace and security and preventing conflict, including by undertaking a number of country-specific visits.

Central African Republic

47. On 28 and 29 December 2016, my Special Representative for Central Africa travelled to Bangui to meet the President, the President of the National Assembly and other interlocutors in order to discuss issues related to the situation in the country, particularly its regional dimension. He also took part in a briefing given on 7 March by the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for the Central African Republic to United Nations entities and the European Union regarding the African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation led by the African Union with ECCAS, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, Chad, Angola and the Republic of the Congo. My Special Representative for Central Africa continued to engage with regional leaders and the Secretary-General of ECCAS, in cooperation with my Special Representative to the Central African Republic, to urge for continued assistance to the Government in its efforts to consolidate peace in the country.

48. On 6 February, my Special Representative for Central Africa travelled to Luanda, where he met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Angola to discuss the situation in the subregion, in particular in the Central African Republic, and the need for enhanced coordination and harmonization of approaches between regional and international actors involved in peace efforts in the country.

Cameroon

49. From 1 to 3 February, my Special Representative travelled to Yaoundé for consultations with national authorities on the situation in Cameroon, particularly in the anglophone regions, and the fight against Boko Haram. He met the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization and civil society actors. He stressed the need for a peaceful solution to the situation and reiterated United Nations support to the efforts of the Lake Chad basin countries in fighting terrorism. Prior to his mission, a working-level team from UNOCA travelled to the country to hold discussions with stakeholders and explore possible entry points for United Nations support.

50. My Special Representative travelled to Yaoundé again from 9 to 13 April, where he met senior Government representatives, opposition figures and civil society actors, as well as the detained leaders of the Cameroon Anglophone Civil Society Consortium, to encourage them to engage in dialogue in order to peacefully address the crisis. During his visit, he encouraged the Government to consider carrying out additional confidence-building measures to further defuse tensions, including the release of the anglophone leaders and the restoration of Internet services as a sign of goodwill. He further urged the authorities to fully implement the measures announced in the justice sector. My Special Representative found the imprisoned leaders of the Consortium to be in good form. They informed him that they were well treated and underlined that they were against secession. They further expressed their readiness to call for the suspension of the strike upon their release

should the Government give its assurances that it would address the grievances of the anglophone regions through dialogue. My Special Representative conveyed the request to the Cameroonian authorities, reiterating his call for their release, while also exhorting all parties to resort to dialogue. He further reiterated the Organization's willingness to provide good offices in this regard, if requested by the parties.

Gabon

51. My Special Representative held frequent meetings with key political actors, including the President, the Prime Minister, Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet, who was leading the national dialogue process, and opposition leaders, as well as representatives of civil society organizations and the diplomatic community, to address outstanding post-electoral tensions. My Special Representative consistently called for an inclusive, transparent and meaningful political dialogue that would address governance challenges facing Gabon. He encouraged the Government to address the opposition's concerns, including through confidence-building measures, while urging the opposition to engage in a constructive manner with the aim of creating conditions conducive to peaceful and credible legislative elections, taking into account the recommendations of the national dialogue. On the eve of the launch of the national dialogue, my Special Representative issued a statement calling for inclusive participation.

Republic of the Congo

52. On 29 and 30 December 2016, my Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville to assess the situation in the Congo. He met the President and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and reiterated the call for an inclusive dialogue and confidence-building measures to pave the way for a peaceful political environment in the run-up to the legislative elections scheduled for July 2017. He also discussed cross-border and subregional issues and called on the country to continue lending support to efforts to defuse tensions and preserve regional peace and stability, in particular regarding the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

53. From 25 to 29 April, my Special Representative travelled to Brazzaville to meet senior officials and other interlocutors to discuss the political and security situation in the country, particularly in the Pool region. He underlined the importance of all political stakeholders engaging in dialogue in order to address grievances, in particular by taking advantage of the newly-created Conseil national du dialogue. He also called on the Government to facilitate humanitarian access to the Pool region; to ensure inclusive, transparent and fair legislative and local elections; and to ensure that detained political leaders receive a fair and speedy trial.

B. Support to United Nations, regional and subregional initiatives on peace and security

United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa

54. In its capacity as the secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, UNOCA facilitated the evaluation of the work of the Committee, as requested by the Committee at its forty-third ministerial meeting, held in Sao Tome and Principe from 28 November to 1 December 2016. The evaluation included the organization of a workshop in Libreville on 27 and 28 April, attended by representatives of member States of the

Committee and the secretariat of ECCAS. The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place in Yaoundé from 29 May to 2 June 2017, during which UNOCA will present the findings of the evaluation.

Collaboration with regional, subregional and intergovernmental organizations

55. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa further enhanced its collaboration with key subregional organizations to address cross-border and regional threats to peace and security in the subregion. On 17 January, my Special Representative met the Secretary-General of ECCAS and discussed the status of implementation of the cooperation framework agreed in June 2016 between the two institutions, a component of the institutional capacity development strategy of UNOCA. On 19 January, a working-level meeting between UNOCA and the secretariat of ECCAS resulted in the identification of key priority areas for joint action and the development of a joint plan of action for collaboration in 2017. Furthermore, within the framework of enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and subregional organizations, the Secretary-General of ECCAS travelled to Abuja to meet the members of the Security Council during their visit to the Lake Chad basin region in order to discuss the regional impact of the Boko Haram crisis.

Mediation

56. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and the secretariat of ECCAS, in cooperation with the Department of Political Affairs, organized a training workshop in Libreville from 24 to 26 April to strengthen the mediation capacities of their personnel. Also participating were the peace and development advisers in Cameroon and Chad, and personnel from MINUSCA and the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The workshop was attended by staff members with direct responsibility for analysing conflicts, advising senior leadership on mediation efforts and supporting the design and facilitation of mediation processes.

57. From 10 to 12 May, UNOCA, with assistance from the Department of Political Affairs, hosted a training workshop in Libreville for the staff of the offices of national mediators and ombudspersons in the subregion. The workshop aimed at building the institutional capacity of the offices and enhancing working-level collaboration within and among those offices, the secretariat of ECCAS and UNOCA. Representatives from the offices of national mediators and ombudspersons in seven countries, as well as staff of the secretariat of ECCAS and UNOCA, attended the training.

58. The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa continued to facilitate efforts aimed at operationalizing the association of the mediators of States members of the Economic Community of Central African States, created in July 2016. On 13 March, UNOCA met the Mediator of Gabon to advocate the drafting of the founding documents of the association, the convening of a meeting of its Steering Committee and ensuring its financial sustainability.

Boko Haram

59. From 13 to 17 February, my Special Representative for Central Africa, together with the Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, undertook a joint visit to the four countries affected by Boko Haram (see also para. 24 above). The delegation met senior officials, as well as representatives of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Multinational Joint Task Force, the diplomatic community and United Nations country teams. The visit served to reiterate the

Organization's commitment to the affected countries and to determine how best the international community could support national and regional counter-terrorism efforts. The affected States acknowledged the need to strengthen regional police and judicial cooperation. One of the main concerns for the affected countries is how to deal with returning foreign terrorist fighters and develop and implement prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for them. Among other things, the States of the region also need to improve their law enforcement and criminal justice responses to the Boko Haram threat.

60. In Chad, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations are extending their outreach to and presence in the isolated communities of return of the released detainees, as well as helping the authorities with their reintegration and community peacebuilding.

Regional integration

61. My Special Representative participated in the thirteenth ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of CEMAC, held in Djibloho on 17 February. The summit assessed current political, security and socioeconomic challenges in the subregion. I reiterated, through my Special Representative, the commitment of the United Nations to supporting the Governments and peoples of the subregion in their efforts to tackle persisting challenges and promote regional integration.

Maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea

62. On 7 February, in Luanda, my Special Representative discussed issues relating to the full operationalization of the Interregional Coordination Centre and other aspects of the implementation of the maritime security strategy with the Executive Secretary of the Gulf of Guinea Commission.

63. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) supported the holding of a workshop and training in December for prosecutors, judges and law enforcement officers from Sao Tome and Principe on the international law of the sea. In addition, through the support of UNODC, the coast guard of the Sao Tome and Principe carried out a patrol operation with criminal investigation police and fisheries experts, 45 nautical miles from the coast.

Regional strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa

64. From 29 November to 1 December, UNODC organized a workshop to support Chadian policymakers in harmonizing legislation with international legal instruments, particularly the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocol against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Their Parts and Components and Ammunition, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Arms Trade Treaty and the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (Kinshasa Convention). The latter entered into force on 8 March.

65. From 24 to 28 January, the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, in collaboration with the Government of Cameroon, organized a workshop in Yaoundé for the training of trainers regarding the fight against the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

66. On 27 January, UNOCA organized a joint meeting between the regional coordinator for the strategy and plan of action on counter-terrorism and the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa and officials from the secretariat of ECCAS to discuss the way forward regarding implementation of the strategy.

Coordination of the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the Lord's Resistance Army

Operationalization of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army

67. From 7 to 9 December, UNOCA participated in a meeting in Addis Ababa aimed at updating the concept of operations of the Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army and strategizing the way forward. Subsequently, on 29 and 30 March, UNOCA participated in the above-mentioned meeting of the Joint Coordination Mechanism (see para. 29 above).

68. In cooperation with the African Union, UNOCA organized the ninth meeting of LRA focal points, held in Entebbe, Uganda, on 15 and 16 December. Participants noted that while progress was made on the operationalization of the Regional Cooperation Initiative and the protection of civilians, there were still gaps concerning humanitarian assistance and long-term development. The need for a redefinition of the African Union Regional Task Force mandate was highlighted, as well as the need for further collaboration with United Nations missions in countries affected by LRA, so as to fill operational gaps.

69. From 14 to 21 March, my Special Representative, together with the African Union Special Envoy on the Lord's Resistance Army, conducted a joint mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda. The purpose of the mission was to discuss, with senior government officials, representatives from United Nations country teams and MONUSCO, diplomatic representatives and other stakeholders, a range of issues connected with counter-LRA efforts, including cooperation with the African Union Regional Task Force, the need for humanitarian assistance and early recovery initiatives in areas affected by LRA, and enhanced information-gathering on the strength and disposition of LRA elements. The planned withdrawal of Ugandan forces from the Task Force and the need to devise actions to prevent LRA from exploiting the resulting security gap, including through training for the Central African armed forces to permit their effective deployment to affected areas, were also key subjects of discussion. However, the issues of the Task Force's sustainment and payment to enable their deployment in remote areas remain unresolved.

70. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan continued to provide logistical support to the African Union Regional Task Force, including access to United Nations flights between Juba and Yambio to staff of the Task Force headquarters, as well as vehicle maintenance and information technology support.

Protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance

71. Through Operation Red Kite, MONUSCO continued to provide logistical support to the offensive against LRA launched by the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has disrupted LRA routes and movements. MONUSCO continued to provide information support to the armed forces and established three mobile operating bases in Badolo, Nakale and Nagero in Haut-Uélé province.

Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration

72. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued to implement Operation *Bienvenue à la paix* to encourage LRA elements to surrender, including through leaflets and radio broadcasting campaigns. Since the beginning of 2017, 12 individuals have surrendered.

Long-term development and peacebuilding support

73. Stabilization and recovery efforts in areas affected by LRA remain seriously underfunded and mostly unaddressed. State authorities and humanitarian and development actors, including United Nations entities, are largely absent.

C. Enhancing United Nations coherence and coordination in the subregion

74. On 6 and 7 December in Libreville, UNOCA participated in the seventh meeting of the Subregional Coordination Mechanism for United Nations system support to programmes of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development in Central Africa. The meeting explored ways in which the United Nations system can further support, in particular, ECCAS and CEMAC in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063 in the subregion.

75. On 23 and 24 March, in Libreville, UNOCA hosted the annual meeting of the heads of United Nations presences in Central Africa, comprising Special Envoys and Representatives of the Secretary-General, regional directors of United Nations system entities and resident coordinators. The meeting assessed current regional and cross-border challenges, as part of a broader strategy to enhance coherence in the Organization's approach to and support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in the subregion. The meeting recommended the development of a subregional strategy to address threats to peace and security, reinforce the preventive diplomacy and good offices mandate of UNOCA and enhance collaboration between UNOCA, Special Envoys and Representatives, resident coordinators, regional offices and the regional economic communities.

76. On 25 and 26 March, UNOCA participated in the eighteenth session of the Regional Coordination Mechanism for Africa, held in Dakar, which discussed United Nations support for harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth.

77. On 4 and 5 April, my Special Representative participated in the joint regional meeting of the United Nations Development Group for Eastern and Southern Africa and Western and Central Africa, held in Gaborone. The meeting aimed to promote greater coherence between the United Nations development, humanitarian, human rights and peacebuilding agendas.

IV. Observations and recommendations

78. Taking note of the continued political tensions within the subregion linked to contested electoral processes and social and economic difficulties, I encourage all stakeholders to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner and in conformity with existing legal frameworks. I welcome efforts that have been undertaken in the subregion to calm tensions, including through processes of inclusive and genuine

dialogue. I encourage all stakeholders to work with each other in good faith to find lasting solutions to political, social and economic challenges. In this regard, I welcome the steps taken by the Government of Cameroon to address concerns raised by the aggrieved parties in the North-West and South-West regions of the country and I encourage the Government to continue to address the situation in a proactive and peaceful manner. I also encourage the Government of Gabon to continue to promote key governance reforms through a genuine and inclusive dialogue. It is my sincere hope that such an approach will contribute to improving the sociopolitical climate, create favourable conditions for the holding of peaceful and credible legislative elections, and consolidate peace and democracy in the country. My Special Representative will continue to carry out his good offices role and engage in preventive diplomacy with all relevant stakeholders.

79. I welcome the efforts made by Governments of the subregion to accelerate and deepen regional integration, including as regards the free movement of persons. I encourage Governments and populations to create the conditions for further integration that will boost economic productivity, increase economic and social opportunities and reinforce security cooperation. I welcome the ongoing evaluation of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa and hope that its outcome will help harmonize regional efforts to address common security threats and strengthen capacities. My Special Representative will continue to work with ECCAS member States in this regard.

80. I am greatly encouraged by the progress in the fight against Boko Haram and by the commendable regional and international cooperation that have made this possible. At the same time, the terrorist group remains a serious threat to regional peace and security, and its activities continue to have devastating consequences for the political, socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights situations in the affected areas. I urge all stakeholders to continue their efforts to bring an end to the crisis, in full conformity with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law. I welcome the signing of the Tripartite Agreement between the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. I am, however, concerned by reports of the refoulement of Nigerian asylum seekers in Cameroon. I reiterate my call for the safe, dignified and voluntary return of all displaced persons. We stand ready to work with both Governments and express the hope that the Tripartite Commission for the Voluntary Repatriation of Nigerian Refugees is constituted as soon as possible.

81. I call on the Governments of the Lake Chad basin countries to focus efforts to address the root causes that contributed to the emergence of the Boko Haram crisis, beyond the military dimension, namely the political and socioeconomic needs of people in marginalized areas. Additionally, as a consequence of the military successes achieved by the Multinational Joint Task Force, countries of the region must now deal with former Boko Haram members who have surrendered, in addition to those already in custody, most of whom have been detained for months and years. The cases of detainees, both national and foreign, need to be promptly processed according to international standards.

82. I welcome the visit by the Security Council to the Lake Chad basin region, which shed a much-needed spotlight on this long neglected crisis. The international community must support the region, including by redoubling its support to the vital humanitarian, early recovery and development needs of the region, as well as through logistical and financial assistance to the affected countries, the Multinational Joint Task Force and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. I welcome the holding of the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region, on 24 February, which drew global attention to the serious humanitarian crisis unfolding in the region. Continued political engagement and rapid and full

disbursement of donor commitments are essential. I also encourage ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to strengthen cooperation and coordination on addressing the root causes of the Boko Haram crisis. UNOCA and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) stand ready to support the two organizations in this regard.

83. I welcome the appointment of the leadership of the Interregional Coordination Centre for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea and call upon regional States and international partners to provide the resources necessary to enable the Centre's full functioning and for the implementation of the maritime security strategy. I call on ECCAS, ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission to deepen their cooperation and coordination. I also call on countries of the region to redouble their efforts in countering incidents of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea. UNOCA, in collaboration with UNOWAS, will continue to provide assistance and mobilize support in combating maritime insecurity.

84. I welcome the recent entry into force of the Kinshasa Convention, which will serve as an important component to reduce the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the subregion. This positive development is a testament to the collective commitment of the concerned States to prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and reduce the human suffering they cause. I would like to encourage the signatories who have yet to ratify the Convention to do so.

85. Poaching and illicit wildlife trafficking continue to threaten endangered animal populations in the subregion and have a negative impact on the overall environmental, governance and security situation, including the continuing links between the illicit wildlife trade and armed groups. I urge Governments in the subregion to focus efforts on eradicating poaching and on operationalizing the existing decisions on countering the illicit wildlife trade, including those contained in General Assembly resolution 69/314.

86. I am concerned by the pervasive instability in the Central African Republic and the continued human rights violations in the country, as well as attacks against United Nations peacekeepers in the south-east of the country. I encourage the Governments of the subregion to remain actively engaged in stabilization efforts. My Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, and my Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of UNOCA, François Louncény Fall, will continue to work closely with regional and subregional organizations in support of national efforts towards finding a peaceful solution to the crisis and to mobilize financial support for the humanitarian response programmes for the affected population. I call on regional and subregional partners to redouble their efforts in support of the Central African Republic, including by lending their full support to efforts to promote the cessation of hostilities and by working cooperatively to jointly address cross-border challenges that affect the situation in the country.

87. The Lord's Resistance Army continues to demonstrate its ability to target civilians in affected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic and negatively affect the security situation there. A steady commitment by the affected States and regional and international partners to address the immediate manifestations of LRA violence, as well as to finance broader protection, humanitarian and development programmes, will be crucial to end the threat. Moreover, the withdrawal of Ugandan and South Sudanese forces from the African Union Regional Task Force, along with the termination of the support from United States special forces, will require redoubled commitment from national, regional and international stakeholders to ensure that LRA does not exploit the resulting vacuum, including through the necessary reconfiguration and

reinforcement of the Regional Task Force and training of the Central African armed forces. I appreciate the dedication and commitment displayed by Ugandan forces and by military personnel of the Task Force and contributing countries, for their efforts and operations, which remain crucial to ending the threat posed by LRA.

88. I would like to express my appreciation to the Governments of Central African countries, ECCAS, CEMAC, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and other regional and subregional institutions for their continued collaboration with UNOCA. I would also like to express my appreciation to the Multinational Joint Task Force and troop-contributing countries for their dedication and commitment to peace and stability in the region. I am grateful to the Government and people of Gabon for their generous hospitality and support to UNOCA. I would like to thank the various entities of the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other entities, for their support to and cooperation with UNOCA.

89. Finally, I would like to thank my Special Representative, François Louncény Fall, and the staff of UNOCA for their efforts to advance the cause of peace and security in Central Africa.